

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

just the basics

Protective Factors

With support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy identified five Protective Factors that reduce child abuse and neglect. These are:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Healthy Social and Emotional Development of Children

WHAT IS STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION?

Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education is a cost-effective, easily adopted strategy to reduce child abuse and neglect. It uses early childhood programs' everyday activities to build Protective Factors around children and families. Strengthening Families emerged from:

- A review of existing research on what it takes to reduce child abuse and neglect
- An intensive national study of exemplary childhood programs
- Interviews, focus groups, and dialogues with hundreds of experts in the field, researchers, practitioners, and parents
- A seven state pilot of policy, funding, and training strategies to support the approach

The research has shown that small but significant changes in early care and education can mobilize extraordinary resources to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect and strengthen families.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE INITIATIVE?

- To increase the number of early childhood programs building Protective Factors around children and families
- To increase awareness that strengthening families is essential to promoting optimal child development as well as reducing child abuse
- To improve working relationships among early childhood programs, child welfare systems, and child abuse prevention programs and initiatives
- To support integrated prevention planning among state agencies with a family-centered approach to early childhood policies

WHAT MAKES STRENGTHENING FAMILIES DIFFERENT?

The Protective Factors are not unique to the Strengthening Families approach; they are addressed by many current child abuse prevention efforts. A Protective Factors approach to child abuse prevention has the advantages of being doable, affordable, and being able to reach millions of families. Using Protective Factors helps programs, policymakers, and communities focus on strengths to build support where it is needed rather than focusing on family deficits.

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IMPLEMENTATION IN STATES ACROSS THE NATION

States across the country are exploring implementation of Strengthening Families at the state level. In 2008, the **Strengthening families National Network** launched, bringing together a community of 24 states infusing a Protective Factors approach into their work across systems with partners in early care and education centers, early childhood systems, and state agencies. Multiple strategies are used to embed Strengthening Families at the state level; examples include:

- Integrating Strengthening Families into early care and education quality rating systems
- Using Child Care Resource and Referral Networks to provide statewide training on the Protective Factors to early childhood programs
- Building linkages between early childhood and child welfare systems with cross-trainings, MOUs, rule changes, and other mechanisms
- Ensuring that all children ages three to five years in foster care is enrolled in a quality early care and education program
- Implementing Strengthening Families as part of a Child Welfare Program Improvement Plan (PIP) in response to federal child welfare quality service reviews
- Training professionals working with children and families in the Protective Factors and ways to build them in families

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILIES?

Resources, materials, and tools developed for early care and education centers and for states during the research and pilot phases of Strengthening Families are available online at www.strengtheningfamilies.net. These include:

- Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education Guidebook
- Early Care and Education Center Online Self Assessment, Parent Questionnaire, and Staff Questionnaire
- Strategies for building a statewide Strengthening Families initiative
- And much more

Levers for Change

A robust state Strengthening Families initiative includes work in the following areas:

- Parent Leadership and Engagement
- Early Childhood Systems Integration
- Professional Development
- Family-Strengthening Child Welfare Practice
- Infrastructure (Quality Rating, Reimbursement, Contracting, etc.) Changes